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Nov. 12, 2004
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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: Father Ralph Beiting will have breakfast with students who volunteered in the Summer Appalachia Program at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 30, in the presidential suite on the third floor of Kennedy Union on campus. Later that morning, he will speak to students in Nick Cardilino's "Faith and Justice" course from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. in Miriam Hall 212.)

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON TO GIVE HONORARY DEGREE TO RALPH BEITING, FOUNDER OF THE CHRISTIAN APPALACHIAN PROJECT, ON NOV. 30

DAYTON, Ohio — It was the happiest mistake of the Rev. Ralph Beiting's life.

"I found myself in Appalachia, pastor of a nonexistent church in a parish the size of Rhode Island, with a total Catholic population of eight — three of them children," Beiting says.

"I thought to myself, 'This has got to be a mistake.'"

That "mistake" evolved into a lifetime of opportunities. In the five decades that followed, Beiting founded or constructed 20 churches and established the Christian Appalachian Project, an interdenominational, nonprofit Christian organization dedicated to providing for the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of Appalachians. Beiting, who has written 12 books on Appalachia and its people, has served as a mentor to students in the University of Dayton Appalachian Club and Appalachia Project since the 1970s.

The University of Dayton will honor Beiting for his half century of service by presenting him with an honorary doctorate of humane letters at **2 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 30**, in the Kennedy Union ballroom. The presentation is free and open to the public.

"I was truly impressed by his impact on our students," says Brother Don Geiger, S.M., a professor of biology who serves on the honorary degree committee. "You can tell people are genuinely enthusiastic about what he's doing."

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Beiting is no stranger to honors. He has been recognized by former Kentucky Gov. Paul Patton for his work in economic development and has received several awards including the Catholic University of America's 1999 Alumnus Lifetime Service Award and the National Catholic Development Conference Good Samaritan Award. Donning the cap and hood at UD, however, makes Beiting especially proud as he admits to always having a "soft spot" for the University.

"It makes me feel good, coming from the University of Dayton, because we've had such a long connection," Beiting says. "But this honor will also make known the work I do in Appalachia. It will call attention to an age-old problem."

At 81, Beiting has no intention of slowing down as he works to bridge the gap between "affluent America and Appalachian America." It's a gap that, despite technological advances in the past few decades, has not been noticeably reduced in Louisa, Ky., a community of 2,000 near the West Virginia border.

"I'm busier now than I have ever been," he says. "And I know I may not change the whole world, but I'm here to serve for as long as I'm needed."

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For media interviews, contact **Father Ralph Beiting** at (606) 638-0219 or **Bro. Don Geiger, S.M.**, at (937) 229-2509.